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ABSTRACT

The School Subjects Attitude Scales is an instrument for measuring students' attitudes toward school subjects for grades 5-12. Twenty-four bipolar word pairs are used with evaluation, usefulness, and difficulty scales. The word pairs were selected on the basis of discussions and analysis of trial forms. Results can be used in program evaluation and curriculum development. One problem with the scales is that they lend themselves to students' faking responses. Persons administering the survey should be neutral with respect to the subject. The reliability of the scales vary; they were found to be valid. The scores can be interpreted in an absolute sense. This report is a brief description of the Scales intended for educators considering use of this instrument. (HFG)

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ED236184

SCHOOL SUBJECTS ATTITUDE SCALES

GENERAL INFORMATION

A Brief Description of the School Subjects Attitude Scales

Intended for Educators Considering Use of This Instrument.

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PLANNING SERVICES

ALBERTA EDUCATION

July, 1983

GENERAL INFORMATION

SCHOOL SUBJECTS ATTITUDES SCALES

Description of the Scales

The School Subjects Attitude Scales was developed during 1978 and 1979 by V.R. Nyberg and S.C.T. Clarke of the University of Alberta. The project was recommended by the Minister's Advisory committee on School Achievement and was funded by Planning and Research, Alberta Education.

Attitudes are closely associated with feelings and emotions. They influence how a person will react to a certain stimulus such as an idea, object, or person. Students' attitudes toward school subjects probably have an effect on motivation, and where choice is possible, on courses and programs taken.

The purpose in developing the scales was to make available an instrument for measuring students' attitudes toward school subjects. It was recognized that a number of goals of education involve the affective domain. While affective goals are important aspects of schooling no commercially prepared instruments for measuring students' attitudes toward school subjects were available. It was therefore decided that the feasibility of developing an instrument be explored.

The scales were developed as group (classroom) measures of students' attitudes toward school subjects. They were not intended for use with individuals.

A list of more than 100 bipolar adjectives was first assembled from various sources, including other semantic differential instruments. Through discussions with teachers and pupils, and through analysis of trial forms, twenty-four word pairs were selected. Factor analysis revealed three scales: evaluation, usefulness, and difficulty. Eight bipolar pairs were adopted for each scale.

Five spaces between each pair are available for the student to rate the school subject. These spaces are labelled, very much, a bit, neither, a bit, and very much. As in all semantic differential type scales, the concept to be judged, in this case the school subject, is rated by placing marks between the adjective pairs. In this way the student expresses what he or she thinks and feels about the school subject.

The scales were designed to be readily understood by teachers and students, to minimize faking, to yield more than one score, to produce valid and reliable results, to be short enough so that several subjects could be rated in a normal class period, to be suitable for all school subjects at widely different grade levels, and to be amenable to both hand and machine scoring. They were intended for use in Grade 5 to Grade 12, but it is likely that they could be used in post secondary institutions.

One possible use of the scales is program evaluation. Thus, if a change in program is proposed, student attitude prior to the change, soon after the change is implemented, and later, could be obtained. The use of the scales in curriculum development is obvious. In addition, differences in attitudes related to class size, socio economic status of parents, geographic area (eg. urban-rural), and ability level could be explored.

One of the common features of attitude measurement is that the person involved usually detects the purpose and may give false responses. This "faking" usually involves giving responses which are thought to be socially acceptable. For example, if a student thinks the teacher of a subject will be able to identify his or her responses, the student may indicated that the subject is liked, is interesting, is useful, etc., to a greater extent than would be the case if anonymity were assured. If the measurement is to reflect the students' true attitudes, procedures must be adopted to minimize the motivation for faking.

Directions for Administering the Scales

Directions to the student are available with the scales and are not reproduced here. It is necessary that HB pencils be used if answer sheets are to be machine scored. Sufficient of these for the largest class will facilitate administration of the scale.

Because faking is possible, procedures should be adopted to reduce motivation for faking. These include the following: student anonymity (the student's name is not required on the answer sheet), no monitoring of responses by the teacher of the student in the subject being rated, and general explanations of the group nature of the results.

The person who administers the scale should be, to the student who is rating a subject, neutral with respect to the subject; eg., a non-teaching principal or vice-principal, teacher of another subject, school psychologist, or the like. Monitoring should be restricted to insuring that the

rating is being done correctly. Names or other identifying data should not be prescribed for the response sheets. The person who collects the sheets should collect them face down, to avoid appearing to scrutinize responses. These suggestions for administration are all designed to reduce faking.

Students have seldom had experience with ratings. The first time the scales are administered to a class the directions to the student should be read with the students, and illustrated. Then the person administering the instrument should start the students on the scales with the "nice-awful" bipolar pair and illustrate how the rating of this pair should be made. The administrator should then indicate that the rest of the biopolar pairs are completed for the same subject in the same way.

Depending on the time required for students to grasp the task, the first administration of the scale may take ten to twenty minutes. Once having had experience, students can usually rate a school subject in five minutes.

Because attitudes toward school subjects may be colored by general attitudes (feeling tired or bored) for comparative uses it is suggested that the scale be administered during the second period of the school day.

Scoring

Each response has a possible value ranging from 1, representing the most negative attitude, to 5, representing the most positive feeling. The items and score values for each response position are shown on the next page.

Evaluative

nice	5	4	3	2	1	awful
boring	1	2	3	4	5	interesting
unpleasant	1	2	3	4	5	pleasant
dislike	1	2	3	4	5	like
bright	5	4	3	2	1	dull
dead	1	2	3	4	5	alive
lively	5	4	3	2	1	listless(inactive,lazy)
exciting	5	4	3	2	1	tiresome(makes a person feel tired)

Usefulness

useless	1	2	3	4	5	useful
important	5	4	3	2	1	unimportant
impractical	1	2	3	4	5	practical
worthless	1	2	3	4	5	valuable
helpful	5	4	3	2	1	unhelpful
unnecessary	1	2	3	4	5	necessary
harmful	1	2	3	4	5	advantageous(brings good or gain)
meaningful	5	4	3	2	1	meaningless(doesn't make sense)

Difficulty

hard	1	2	3	4	5	easy
light	5	4	3	2	1	heavy(a lot of work)
clear	5	4	3	2	1	confusing(mixes a person up)
complicated	1	2	3	4	5	simple
elementary	5	4	3	2	1	advanced(beyond the beginning level)
strange	1	2	3	4	5	familiar
understandable	5	4	3	2	1	puzzling(hard to understand)
undemanding	5	4	3	2	1	rigorous(has to be exactly right)

The scales can be machine scored through services that are available, or hand scored according to instructions provided in the ADMINISTRATOR'S MANUAL.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the scales varies from scale to scale, subject to subject, and grade to grade. When used for classroom groups the reliabilities are very nearly all well above .90. Calculations of a sample of the reliability estimates indicates that the Difficulty scale is slightly less reliable than the other scales.

On four different comparisons the scales were found to be valid. The comparisons included expert opinion, student preferences, sex differences, and cultural differences. A study of the relationship with achievement and intelligence gave further evidence of validity, as did the factor analyses.

Interpretation of Results

The ADMINISTRATOR'S MANUAL provides norms for Grades 5 through Grade 12 in many school subjects, particularly those most commonly taught. The norms provide an adjustment for time of year (at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a course) and for differences in the ratio of the sexes in classes. The norms apply to students in Alberta schools during June, 1982, September, 1982, November 1982 (semestered high school classes), and February, 1983.

Scores can also be interpreted in an absolute sense. Each scale consists of eight word pairs, therefore, the score range for each scale is 8 to 40. A "neutral" attitude corresponds to a score of 24. An evaluative score above 24 indicates that the subject is liked, a usefulness score above 24 indicates that the students find the subject useful, and difficulty score above 24 indicates that the students find the subject easy. Similarly, scale scores below 24 indicate a dislike for a subject, that it is not useful, and that it is difficult.